

***The Destruction of Humanity by Modern Plagues***

**An Honors Thesis (ENG 444)**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Society has certainly changed over the last few decades. However, certain changes have made it difficult for young people to live, mature, and even find purpose in their lives. Significant research has been done which proves the negative impacts that technology and the digital age have had on the cognitive development and social rearing of young people. The current college-age generation displays signs of three dangerous habits: self-obsession, instant gratification, and a lack of purpose. I call these the modern plagues, and as a member of the college-age generation, my goal is to shine the spotlight on some of the many ways which society is threatening the humanity of its future leaders and generations. My thesis argues that these three plagues are extremely prevalent among students in college and that they are only being exacerbated by the college experience. Students are going to classes which break down their beliefs and convictions, but nothing is given to them to rebuild their life and purpose. There are many challenges which college students face, yet the foundation and source of nearly all the problems specific to their generation can be explained by analyzing the three plagues. College students are consumed by self-obsession, addicted to instant gratification, and plagued by a lack of purpose. However, understanding what these students are up against and how society facilitates these problems is the first step to creating an environment where students can grow rather than one that prolongs their childhood.

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## **Process Analysis Statement**

This project was enlightening and satisfying. The idea for a thesis dawned on my mind while in Dr. Ranieri's ENG 444 class in Fall of 2019. I knew I wanted to write about my own generation and tie it into a reflection of my time at college. I had often had conversations with my roommates and my mentors about the state of society, the trends of the young, and the changes in behavior among people due to technology. I had encountered the typical rant against social media from the "boomer-aged white man" stereotype, and as such, many viewed this as lacking credibility. To express some of these ideas, concerns, and observations, I realized that a message might be better received if the voice came from within the belly of the beast. The struggles of the young are struggles that I share, and I am extremely passionate about bettering myself, so this project became one of identifying the problems college students faced by going straight to the cause.

The process started with incorporating themes or ideas into other papers. Then, I started the long process of mental preparation and planning (as is my normal method of drafting). I dove through old papers I had written regarding social media or modern relationships, taking note of any sources I could use from other classes. Then, the research really began in full. I revisited some old books, started researching several articles and studies, and tried to fact-check my assumptions and gut feelings about college. Of course, much of my paper is informed by nearly 4 years of immersive experience. The claims and arguments I make in the paper are simply refined, developed, and supported by the various texts I used to more thoroughly and accurately express the ideas I wished to convey.

One of the biggest challenges which I faced was the temptation to be too categorical; I frequently made statements or used wording which indicated that all was lost or some statement affected every single person without exception. As I received more and more feedback from Dr. Ranieri, and after taking a step back, my tone was tempered and I became much more holistic in my approach to my research and writing. A project of this size and seriousness, coupled with Dr. Ranieri's sage guidance, truly helped push my writing style to the next level. I found myself internally reviewing my writing as I progressed through a paragraph, noticing the minor details so much more and ensuring consistency and intentionality when writing. This project was also humbling because it made me reflect on my own failings, my own challenges, and then evaluate the ways I could have been better. I also recognized my tendency to quickly adopt a condemnatory tone when writing which is simply presumptuous. However, I was able to overcome these challenges and grow as a student by the completion of the project.

This project could seriously help college students understand some of the challenges they are up against. Additionally, much of the research reveals some of the damaging trends which society promotes and often facilitates. As a reader, I would approach this as a story, a story that illustrates real challenges and real people that one will encounter in college. Although much of my paper is steeped in the college experience, it should be noted that the trends and findings which my paper include can be extrapolated and applied to the rest of the younger generation as much of the foundation for these issues is established at a much younger age.

### The Destruction of Humanity by Modern Plagues

The greatest threat to humanity is anything which devalues humanity itself. Personhood is a privilege and an opportunity. Humans are endowed with an elevated intellect which pursues truth as its direct object. The intellect is elevated because humans alone possess rational thinking ability. Once the intellect perceives something as good, that information and perception informs the will. The will is another human faculty which pursues the good. Both these faculties operate in reality; however, humans perceive reality in unique ways. If individuals possess varying perceptions of reality, then the same principle can be applied to generations of people. No one denies that differences between generations exist. Consider the distinctions between a child and his or her parents. Children frequently struggle to understand their parents' reasoning and fall into a stage of rebellion when they search for their own answers to life's questions. Parents communicate explanations which are foreign to the minds of their children, and the interplay between authority figures and young people is characteristically incompatible, strained, and at times, even hostile. Such a relationship is encapsulated by a common and specific dichotomy: the older generation often observes the younger generation with a confusion, sometimes evolving into disappointment, while the younger gazes upon the older with paradoxical condescension and a dismissive presumptuousness. The preceding claims and statements may appear obvious, but the current, younger generation has developed in a society and environment which is significantly different than any before in history. Modern society envelopes the youth in an atmosphere that bequeaths three cancerous plagues upon the current generation: Self-obsession, instant gratification, and lack of purpose. This nefarious triumvirate pervades all of society and undermines humanity. For proof, one must simply observe. People have changed.

As a senior in college, at the young age of twenty-three, I have witnessed this change firsthand. Some people may question my ability to make such a judgement, citing a naiveté that is characteristic of my age. Nevertheless, I am confident in my assessment which is bolstered by both personal experience and significant research.

The claim that society is suffering is by no means an extreme one. The deterioration of humanity in people across all swaths of life is apparent. Our culture is witnessing an inversion of the natural order within men and women, and such a phenomenon should not be surprising. The most disconcerting aspect resides in the bleak reality that people have recognized it and responded with apathy. Yes, many acknowledge a problem. Some even hazard a reasonable guess as to how such a revolution against humanity has occurred. The crux of this upheaval within the natural order is situated comfortably in the minds and hearts of the younger generation. When I speak of the younger generation, I am speaking of those in college, my peers. So, a severe and precarious disorder grows and flourishes within this generation. This is a harsh premise, but one that I endeavor to explain in the following pages. The key to my argument is not to prove this point of disorder within college students, but rather to critically and thoroughly examine three of the marks which, as a result, brand our youth as a generation.

Self-obsession, instant gratification, and lack of purpose are the three plagues which assault and destroy the essence of our humanity. I call these marks the modern plagues, for they have risen out of societal “progress” and “advancement.” By analyzing these plagues in-depth, their profound impact upon college students will be revealed. Although these concepts may appear abstract, generic, or simply disdainful from my young perspective, I contend that it is a result of my experiences within college that have well-equipped me to elaborate on some of the common features that are hurting myself and my peers.

The future of society is determined by the future of the youth. As college students prepare to enter the “real world,” each institution ushers into society a graduating class that is infected with these plagues. One of the most virulent among these is the disease of self-obsession. Self-obsession is simple: everything someone wants, thinks, or does is dictated by a personal desire for happiness. This leads to a narcissistic tendency which neglects any consideration for anyone else. Additionally, and probably most importantly, such a mentality reduces the consideration of what is both good and beneficial to a subjective, severely warped standard. Self-obsession is the most common of the plagues which I have seen in college, and although technology and social media are now standard equipment for the young, these two factors exacerbate self-obsession and embed it more deeply within a person. It follows that social media and technology go hand-in-hand, often treated synonymously. Modern culture not only provides for self-obsession, it promotes it. James McWilliams (2016) points out in an article he wrote in *The American Scholar* that a movement towards idealizing the self has infected our society. He summarizes an idea from Matthew Crawford’s book, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*, “The Western obsession has fostered an ‘inattentional blindness’ to the ‘shared world.’ This unthinking myopia has engendered a form of solipsism whereby the self believes that it somehow accounts, *sui generis*, for its own revelations.” McWilliams continues on and eventually quotes Crawford directly, “Such exceeding faith in one’s tender bloom of selfhood erases all awareness that, in Crawford’s words, ‘we rightly owe to one another a certain level of attentiveness and ethical care.’ Instead, it’s all about you.”

A claim such as this is powerful and brings attention to many of the negative effects of our culture, a culture that is fueled by social media and technology. To unpack the quotation, it is necessary to understand some key ideas. Solipsism is a philosophical stance that nothing can



really be known outside of our personal existence. College students do not ascribe to this philosophy formally, but they are materially complicit and adopt it as part of their lifestyle. Such ignorance and self-absorption shines through in many ways, one of which manifests itself through communication and relationships with others. As soon as we encounter something which we do not already believe, we label and approach it as foreign and hostile. Solipsism creates epistemological concerns because college students who are self-obsessed naturally ostracize themselves from any information or communication that is contrary to what they personally hold to be true. This default reaction cultivates an isolationist mentality which further polarizes people and destroys any opportunity for meaningful and constructive dialogue. Additionally, self-obsession clearly affects our relationships with others. I have personally encountered numerous people throughout my time at college who are simply incapable of holding a conversation. Communication skills have been lost, and basic social etiquette is not far behind. I find it difficult to fathom that, even after being in college for some time, I meet upperclassmen who lack an expected degree self-awareness and sincerity. First, step into any college classroom and nearly everyone is on a phone. Even in the ten minutes before class begins, students would rather stare at their devices than hold a conversation with a neighbor. As clinical psychologist and professor of technology at MIT Sherry Turkle (2011) writes, “Real life takes too many steps and can always disappoint” (p. 224). Turkle captures the attitude of someone who let technology absorb all their motivation and energy. Real life is the world that exists outside of the smartphone, the laptop, or the tablet. Real life requires both effort and a care for people outside of oneself. Real life can disappoint, and God-forbid that our perfect little worlds be subjected to any level of discomfort.

The problem is that many of the college students do indeed come from perfect little worlds. I am not saying that everyone comes from a prosperous socioeconomic class, but am attempting to analyze the “personal world” that students now possess. The younger generation suffers from being insulated, protected, and coddled. Those tasked with raising the current generation have allowed their paranoia to affect the way they raise children. Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt address this increasingly common phenomenon in their book, *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018). Lukianoff and Haidt take a profound look at the raising of children and the effects certain practices have on a child’s cognitive and social development. One fascinating point they make is that too many parents, teachers, and mentors treat suffering and failure as intrinsically evil. As the authors put it, “...teaching kids that failures, insults, and painful experiences will do lasting damage is harmful in and of itself. Human beings *need* physical and mental challenges and stressors or we deteriorate” (p. 22). Students go into college with this same mentality, having received the message loud and clear: anything that is unpleasant or difficult has no value. Again, such a conception of suffering could not be further from the truth. Lukianoff and Haidt later write, “Risks and stressors are natural, unavoidable parts of life, parents and teachers should be helping kids develop their innate abilities to grow and learn from such experiences” (p. 23). Alas, parents and teachers have forfeited this pedagogy. Now, students berate teachers for assigning difficult reading and children criticize their parents if they demand responsibility. Where does this lead, and what effect does it have on children and students in their formative years? Lukianoff and Haidt take us to the grim, logical conclusion, “If we protect children from various classes of potentially upsetting experiences, we make it far more likely that those children will be unable to cope with such events when they leave our protective umbrella” (p. 24). To put it plainly, a lenient formation begets certain expectations. A child who has never been challenged at home does not expect their teacher to challenge them in the classroom.

Likewise, a student that makes it through college while avoiding all opportunities for growth will be at a significant disadvantage when entering the workforce. An environment that nurtures coddling instills expectations for every experience to come. The perfect little world can only be preserved for so long before the pillars collapse under the weight of real life.

Another form of self-obsession is superficiality. The platforms of social media and technology have given rise to a contagious trend of duplicity. The anonymous or protective barrier which the digital screen provides engenders narcissistic and rude behavior. Simply a casual perusing of any chatroom or YouTube comment section quickly proves this assertion. A viewer inevitably encounters depraved and indecorous statements made by numerous people who hide behind an arbitrary username. Bill Davidow (2013) makes a keen observation which illustrates how technology acts as a catalyst for this inhuman behavior: “In virtual space many of the physical interactions that restrain behavior vanish. Delusions of grandeur, narcissism, viciousness, impulsivity, and infantile behavior for some individuals rise to the surface.” Davidow provides a laundry list of epithets which he ascribes to the clientele of technology. He too believes technology leads to narcissism. Is this really the environment that college students ought to embrace? Certainly not, especially since the college years are structured, intended to be formative, and are often laden with significant challenges and opportunities for growth.

Duplicitous behavior is regressive, and Juanita Pienaar (2019) points out that, “Social media has actually trapped us into a bubble. And, for many people, that bubble has become a depressing place to be because it's very inward-looking.” Herein lies the problem—college students are at a crucial point in determining their future, but they are practicing self-destructive behaviors. They fix their gaze on devices like Narcissus’ mirror; however, sometimes they do not like what they see. The ability to appreciate someone or be happy for someone other than oneself

is lost after being exposed to only the best parts of their “friends” lives. Relationships, our connections with others, are under attack. Not only does social media degrade us morally, it also injures our mental health. Pienaar states later in her article that:

Facebook has become very good at what is called "attention-hacking" and the social platforms have become very good at hacking into that attention and retaining it. Once upon a time, social media made you really happy. But, today, it increasingly depersonalises the connections that you're making and damages mental health.

Attention-hacking, depersonalization, damage to mental health—these are serious issues. College students experience seriously high rates of anxiety and depression to begin with because of the stress involved with the college experience. So much is riding on a successful undergraduate career, so why do students choose lifestyles which exacerbate these problems? Personally, I too have suffered from and seen the effects of attention-hacking. Who can sit down and read a book for more than fifteen minutes without looking at their phone? I struggle to apply myself to work and to maintain focus when doing difficult projects which require deep attention. The attention that is left over is spent in obsessing over the self. I have seen so many of my classmates who are on their phone or computer and actively engaged in something unrelated to the class they are attending. No wonder people struggle with grades, discipline, or academic success; their primary focus is themselves. As Nicholas Carr (2008) states about his own experiences, “Over the past few years I’ve had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory.” Understanding the implications of how modern technology is affecting us on an intellectual level is crucial. Carr gives a personal account of the transition he sees in his mind. Furthermore, he speaks to how the fragmentation of his attention affects him specifically when reading a book, “Now my

concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do.” Nearly all college students have not reached full brain development during their undergraduate, yet they are complicit in this destructive behavior which inhibits their cognitive growth. Yes, humans change and develop, but these changes are a direct result of an obsession with the self and are anything but progressive.

The first modern plague, self-obsession, blinds individuals at an early age. Humanity is at risk when college students, those who are about to enter the “real world”, are foolishly and recklessly harming their human development. Where does this obsession lead? Sadly, self-obsession is the driving force of the second modern plague: instant gratification. The opportunity to have every want and desire filled instantaneously lays the foundation for a dangerous, personal utopia. Why dangerous? Does it not seem sensible that if we could have everything we wanted, our lives would be much happier? The problem is exactly that—being given or able to take what we want does not constitute happiness. On the contrary, the multiplicity of choices and opportunities create severe risks for our human psyche. Opportunities create the potential to miss them; choices imply that we must say no in order to say yes; possessions are not indicative of happiness. Instant gratification continues to cultivate the self-obsession we have already discussed, and the negative effects it has on humanity is substantial.

The alleged progress of modern society is responsible for creating more and more opportunities for instant gratification. As is natural, many of the issues seen in college students can be traced back to their home life. Unfortunately, parents are simply failing at being parents. Modern society continues to fuel the revolution against authority which plagues this country. A monumental power shift has taken place, from the adults to children and from teachers to students. Of course, parenting is no easy task; but, I argue that many parents acknowledge the

difficulties raising a child imposes and simply use that as an excuse to appease their children at all costs. The most disheartening practice I have witnessed is seeing parents going about their day, whether it be at the grocery store or an appointment, while their young child in a stroller is entertained by a digital device that is nearly too big for the small child to hold. My focus remains on college students, but those poor, neglectfully appeased children are now finding their way in college.

My first semester at university, I remember being in a core curriculum class (full of eighteen-year-old freshmen) and hearing so many people talk about drunkenness and sexual exploits. What I realized then is that the current generation of college students have never been taught self-control. Self-control is antithetical to instant gratification; indeed, the necessity for self-control has been virtually eliminated from our society. Access is quasi-unlimited. In an article by Alexandra Samuel (2017), she points out the need for self-control and the dangers technology poses:

If self-control is such a powerful resource—and one that is amenable to conscious development—no wonder we are leery of technologies that render it irrelevant, or worse yet, undermine our carefully practiced ability to wait for gratification. You can shower your kid (or yourself) with mindfulness training and withheld marshmallows, but as long as everything from ice cream to marijuana is just one click away, you're fighting an uphill battle for self-control.

Samuel's words strike a chord with many of the issues college students face today. Self-control is a foreign concept, a virtue vanishing from society. Instant gratification fosters a selfish attitude and a blindness to anything or anyone outside of an individual's needs and desires. Students abuse drugs for a passing high. Students abuse alcohol to forget about responsibility. Students

have sex with strangers in a strictly utilitarian way which denigrates the act, the wholesome existence of marriage and the family, and go so far as to exalt personal pleasure and satisfaction above all else.

Instant gratification robs students of their ability to look at anything from a long-term perspective. I encounter classmates daily who speak about classes, their goals, and their future in a careless and disinterested way, yet their enthusiasm for meaningless and ephemeral pursuits is unmatched. In an article she penned already thirteen years ago, Arianna Huffington (2007) notes the misplaced priorities people have and the insidious nature of instant gratification:

The promise of unlimited opportunity has given way to rampant narcissism and misplaced perfectionism (and the disappointed self-loathing that inevitably follows the search for a flawless self). Happiness today has been reduced to instant gratification. We search for “happy hours” that leave us stumbling through life; we devour “Happy Meals” that barely nourish the body; we believe the ads that tell us that there is a pill for every ill, and that happiness is just a tablet away.

Society indoctrinates us into a culture of consumerism. We seek every opportunity to fulfill some passing desire. I am convinced college students struggle so much because the structure of college is oriented as a relatively long-term means to a long-term goal. Students are incapable of thinking this way. I know many people who entered college undecided in terms of a major. This is not meant to chastise people who are truly struggling, but it raises a question: what were these people doing all their life if they cannot answer the questions “what are you passionate about,” or, “what do you want to do with your life?” Such a thought is concerning. Despite this, the blame is not unilateral.

One of the primary factors facing and overwhelming college students is the inundation of choices. In his national bestseller *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz (2004) makes a keen observation regarding the inordinate number of options facing people in our modern society and the toll it takes:

The emotional costs of potential trade-offs does more than just diminish our sense of satisfaction with a decision. It also interferes with the quality of decisions themselves. There is a great deal of evidence that negative emotional states of mind narrow our focus. Instead of examining all aspects of a decision, we hone in on only one or two, perhaps ignoring aspects of the decision that are very important. Negative emotion also distracts us, inducing us to focus on the emotion rather than on the decision itself. (p. 136)

Schwartz reveals that so many choices are negatively affecting our decision making.

Emotionally, college students frequently suffer from missed opportunities, seeing them as a lost chance at either being successful or enjoying themselves. Because students must choose one major, for instance, they must cope with the fact that that decision now eliminates the dozens of other majors which are no longer available. Additionally, as Schwartz says, the quality of decisions suffers and emotions remain in a negative state. Already, as we have discussed, instant gratification plagues college students. Such an ingrained habit in students merely compounds the problem of having so many options. If we apply instant gratification to this scenario, students will opt for the easiest or most rewarding path when deciding their future. Little attention or consideration is given to long-term fulfillment or the prudence of their choice because their emotions dictate their decisions. Obviously, bad decisions in the beginning of a college career lead to poor experiences throughout the undergraduate years. As a result, students drag their feet through college, content simply to “get by” and to receive a passing grade, to avoid upsetting



their parents. Meanwhile, they search to alleviate their depressed emotional state through short bursts of gratification. If this is the college experience, all it does is prolong childhood. Students remain in a state of dependency. They revert to the only remedy they are certain will cure them: when a baby cries, stick technology in their face and forget about them. In this analogy, college students differ from infants in only one way—the quick-fix is self-administered. Society and public colleges are failing to bring students out of this infantilized state. These students are being coddled, both by themselves and by the universities they attend. If the incipient workforce and generation of active citizens are currently in college and continue to act this way, the future of society is hard to predict, for neither the students nor those in authority are able to see the next step. What are the implications of this? I am no predictor of the future, but following the progression of recent years, I can assert a hypothesis. Students, and the next wave of college-educated youths, will have a rude awakening. Either society will drastically change, including the way we interact with each other and the expectations we have, or matters will worsen to the point of necessary reform, a reform that will begin within the minds and hearts of people who recognize that there is more to life than satisfaction and pleasure.

Instant gratification has been compounded by society and the technologies available. After indoctrinating a generation of students in an environment that engenders self-obsession, society equips these young and impressionable students with the means to have whatever their hearts desire. The result is devastating; college students are typically left alone to battle these plagues. Few people in a position of authority are willing or ready to point them in the right direction, to reveal to them the error of their ways, or to give them something meaningful to pursue. Self-obsession and instant gratification culminate into the worst of the three modern plagues: lack of purpose.

Students cannot see past their immediate desires, they are incapable of denying themselves, so they become their own end. Lack of real purpose undermines any foundations which may have been built under the feet of these students. In college, we are told to question what we know, to question our parents, to question our schooling up until this point, and to question everything that we believed before entering college. Modern society emphasizes this deconstructive process whereby convictions are replaced by a mirror—we are meant to discover “who we are” by constantly looking at ourselves. For the self-obsessed college student, armed with the power of instant gratification, he or she gradually loses faith in their previous beliefs and are given nothing to rebuild their purpose.

People need purpose. Can we imagine someone who does not live their life for some sort of purpose? Yes; and unfortunately, that is the state of many college students today. I have seen it numerous times—artificial causes and superficial banners are what drive the current generation. Walk into any classroom and a host of laptop stickers, tattoos, T-shirts, and backpack pins act as greeters. Why have these external signs and labels become so prevalent, become a hallmark of college students? Students don labels because they momentarily satiate an innate need for a purpose, a need to fight for something.

I often wonder what will happen to my classmates when the issues they are so adamant about are finally resolved. To the classmate who is a staunch feminist: when will you be content, and what will drive your life when, for you, women are equal to men? To the classmate who is concerned about the environment: if climate change were fixed or did not exist, where would you find your passion? To the classmate who is convinced guns cause so many problems, what else would you talk about if gun rights were revoked? These examples are all rooted in temporary or passing issues. Additionally, labels and social movements are all projected by the media and rise

and fall at swift rates. One week I hear that people are up in arms about a school shooting, but then the commotion quickly subsides and nothing further is said. When I speak of purpose, I mean a cause or goal which drives someone and informs their actions throughout their life. Students lack purpose because it necessitates a recognition of a reality which is long-term. Students fear the loss of their dependency and their infantile state where everything is taken care of for them. In an article that discusses how college destroys purpose, Zach Mercurio (2017) makes the following observation:

When students have to answer “why” questions, responsibility ensues. The brain and heart are activated, and students actually have to consider their situation, the multiple variables involved in their potential future, and decide a specific and immediate course of action based upon their assessment of these variables - independent of someone else’s plan.

Students cannot answer the vital questions, the “why” questions. Their entire college career breaks down their beliefs, forces them to question everything, yet fails to provide them with anything else to rebuild their fractured foundations. College is intended to supply students with a time and an environment which allows them to pursue their passion and determine their goals. However, William Deresiewicz (2014) makes a keen observation when speaking about the shortfalls of college, “No more than in high school are students equipped to address the larger questions of meaning and purpose, about their education and their lives, that come so inevitably in young adulthood.” What are these students being given? Clearly, one cannot wholly blame them for their lost condition. What they have been given may not be insufficient, but students are lost without a direction for their gifts.

Modern society leaves college students with a void. This void is a lack of purpose which causes severe problems in the younger generation. It should be no surprise that, yet again, social media plays a key part in the negative consequences which follow. A void so substantial and vital as purpose demands to be filled. As established, self-obsession and instant gratification are two ruinous plagues that undermine the goodness of humanity. When these two plagues are present, they engender a lifestyle which fills the void of purpose with the self. Self-obsession takes its final form when someone is so consumed by their desires and immediate gratification that they become their final cause for existence. The self, in other words, becomes the end which someone is *for*, i.e., their purpose. Everything revolves around the self, is reduced to the self, and is interpreted in terms of the self. To bring it back to the definitions stated earlier, the intellect is oriented towards seeking the truth. When the self becomes the end for existence, the intellect does not conform to reality, but rather, the intellect tries to conform reality to the self. This is the ultimate form of self-obsession, this idea that life and purpose are determined by the self. Additionally, such a warped understanding of life leads to a significant problem which college students demonstrate daily: feelings determine truth. When someone is self-obsessed, takes advantages of instant gratification, and acts in a way that places themselves as the final cause for existence, their emotions play a substantial and powerful role in determining “truth.”

Emotional reasoning is something that anyone will quickly encounter should they spend some time on a college campus. Emotional reasoning sounds complicated to define, but it is easy to identify. Leon Seltzer (2017), a clinical psychologist who holds doctorates in both English and Psychology, states that emotional reasoning was originally a term used to describe a cognitive disorder. Seltzer goes on to explain this concept further, “...whenever someone concludes that their emotional reaction to something thereby defines its reality, they’re engaged in emotional

reasoning. Any observed evidence is disregarded or dismissed in favor of the assumed “truth” of their feelings.” From this description, emotional reasoning is clearly dangerous. Emotions are often changeable and superficial, yet many people allow them to define their reality. Evidence is dismissed because emotions determine reality. Should we encourage this cognitive disorder? Should we abandon truth to the individual caprices of the human mind? No; however, that is exactly what colleges are doing to students. No teacher will ever critique their students, nor will they discipline them in the classroom. The power shift is real, and students know that they possess the might to do what they want. Even among their peers, students argue incessantly about the same topical issues, only to end the argument in discontent because both parties are typically motivated and inspired by emotions. Emotions do not justify arguments, policies, or movements.

Emotions should not take precedence in our lives, otherwise chaos would ensue. Someone can feel the emotion of anger and restrain their desire to punch someone. Social norms check and balance our outward behavior, but they do not check our intellectual or private behavior. College students fall into this trap of exalting themselves above all others. Consequently, and I can personally attest to this, college students are sensitive. Any critique of their likes, desires, work, or lifestyle is met with a virulent rebuttal, and the one making the comments is labeled as intolerant. This reaction ensues because they are their own world, their own end, their own purpose; any attack on something they enjoy or feel is akin to an attack on God for a Catholic. When a person has become their own end, everything which does not make them happy is inimical to that end. Therefore, humanity is destroyed because there is no room for discipline, no room for self-denial, no room for the benefits of suffering, and no room for

meaningful relationships. This type of existence is sad and bleak, and simply points to the many problems our society is facing today.

Society is destroying humanity. Self-obsession, instant gratification, and lack of purpose consume the collegiate generation. Young men and women are getting lost in themselves which blinds them to the vast goodness which is present and waiting around them. Self-obsession dominates our culture and insidiously slithers its way into every aspect of life. College students are placed in the spotlight by their parents, held in that spotlight by the universities they attend, and by then are accustomed to being comfortable in their own world. Social media is the primary agent of self-obsession, fueling any latent narcissism within the younger generation and providing a platform where they can display themselves. The paradox is the connectivity which is offered by social media. We live in an age where we have the greatest opportunity to interact with people, yet it has isolated us from others. College students crave attention, and thus they abuse the social media platforms to project their perceived goodness and beauty for all the world to see. Receiving this attention momentarily satiates their need for instant gratification. In a society that presents people with access to more than they could ever have, there is no room for abnegation or self-sacrifice. Humility, discipline, empathy, self-reflection, and sacrifice are intimately linked to purpose; therefore, when the self becomes someone's end, these virtues are employed only when such acts benefit the actor.

A self-obsessed life, punctuated by instant gratification, and culminating in a life that lacks purpose—thus are the ramifications of the modern plagues. Generations of college students are falling prey to these diseases. The infection is contagious, and no one seems to notice (or at least care) about its rapid spread. Considering these factors and their effects, society leaves us with little room to hope.

Where is the silver lining? Good can always come out of evil, and no one is lost forever. I have seen it already taking place, for my peers at least acknowledge their depressing state. Not only this, but I know many people who have deleted social media. People are starting to ask *why*. Being able to both ask and answer the why questions is imperative, for no life is worth living if a true purpose is lacking. What must be done is to rekindle the flames of passion and discipline in the minds and hearts of students. College cannot simply be a prerequisite for a good job. Teachers cannot simply be channels of information. Students must be given more than the tools to deconstruct their beliefs and various, unexplained pages from a textbook. College students may be adults by law, but many (if not all) are still growing, maturing, and developing. The mind of a college student is still malleable and full of potential, and it demands to be filled. College cannot neglect the formation of its students, because society has already sabotaged the formation of its youth. If nothing is done, the modern plagues will destroy humanity, as each generation ages and infects the young.

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